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MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
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 21 MAY 2004
 WHITEHALL
 LONDON SW1

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Good

It makes a real difference to have these former lies

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18 May 2004

Thank you for your letter of 11 May 2004 following my statement in the House. I am disappointed that you do not feel that you received answers to your questions. I quite clearly stated that Ministers had not seen the ICRC report in February as officials correctly judged that the matters relating to British Forces had already been dealt with. Ministers first received a copy of the report shortly before I made my statement. I do not see how that can be construed as not answering your questions on the handling of the report.

In theatre, ICRC representatives have had full and unfettered access to UK detention facilities from the outset. They first visited UK facilities in March 2003 and have visited regularly thereafter. The Armed Forces have worked closely with representatives of the ICRC and where concerns have been brought to the attention of commanders, every effort has been made to address them. The ICRC indicated following its latest visit to the UK detention facility in April 2004 that it was satisfied with UK responses when they had raised concerns.

The Hon Nicholas Soames MP
 House of Commons

Whenever a substantive allegation comes to the attention of commanders on the ground, they call for an investigation by the relevant service police. The first such investigation into alleged ill-treatment of prisoners began on 18 April last year. This was the widely publicised case of Colonel Tim Collins, which concluded that there was no case to answer.

The Armed Forces are fully aware of their obligations under international law. They are given thorough mandatory training courses which include specific guidance on handling Prisoners of War. All personnel must attend refresher training every year. Before deploying to Iraq all personnel are briefed on the Rules of Engagement and procedures for dealing with Prisoners of War or other detainees. Each combat unit is required to have eight senior non-commissioned officers trained in handling Prisoners of War and units which are responsible for the routine handling of detainees conduct further specialist training. The overwhelming majority of personnel have acted entirely properly in their dealings with prisoners, but what is important is that arrangements are in place to properly investigate allegations and deal with anyone found to have acted illegally.

The policy on hooding is quite straightforward. We regard the use of hoods during interrogation as contrary to the Geneva Conventions. This technique has never been part of the standard operating procedure on Operation TELIC. The Defence Intelligence and Security Centre explicitly teaches interrogators not to use this technique. However there are some circumstances in which hooding prisoners can legitimately be used during their capture to conceal sensitive information such as the disposition of friendly forces. We always recognised that it was desirable to cease the practice as quickly as possible and commanders on the ground judged that we could safely do so by May last year. When these commanders were replaced during a routine roulement in July the direction was lost. However, Chief of Joint Operations then issued a directive in September 2003 that the hooding should stop.

Your final question was on the British personnel deployed to the Joint Interrogation and Detention Centre in Abu Ghraib. They were not aware of any incidences or allegations of abuse taking place during their time at Abu Ghraib. The incidents under investigation by the US authorities took place prior to the arrival of the UK personnel in Abu Ghraib. If UK personnel had witnessed any abuse at any time, they would have reported it to the authorities. In the event they had no reason to do so. The Armed Forces Minister has written to the Hon Member for Mid Norfolk to correct his assertion to the contrary.

Signed on Original
GEOFFREY HOON